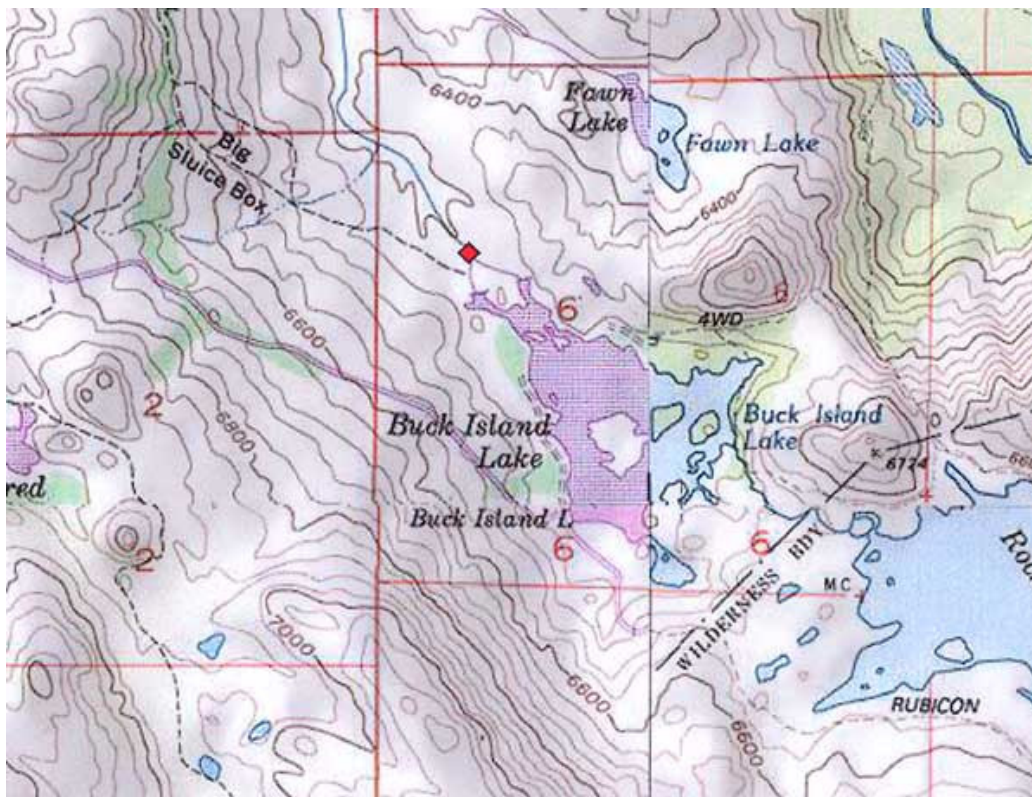


**Report on Conditions 16 July 2008 at the Buck Island Lake
Area on the Rubicon 4x4 Trail, An El Dorado County Road
in the Eldorado National Forest, California
by Monte Hendricks**



Buck Island Lake is part of SMUD's Upper American River Project. Water is moved from Rubicon Reservoir to Rockbound Lake then on to Buck Island Lake where it is diverted into a tunnel taking the water to Loon Lake. Several years ago, in response to a complaint filed by California Sport Fishing Protection Alliance and California Trout - the USFS, California Department of Fish & Game, and SMUD worked together to raise the level of Buck Island Lake by about four feet for more water storage to meet minimum flow requirements for fish downstream in the Little Rubicon (which flows out of Buck Island Lake and into the Rubicon River) and Rubicon River.



The following report and my photos will focus in on just the dispersed camping area along the Little Rubicon River flowing out of the dam on Buck Island Lake. Similar impacts are evident in the area along the shore of Buck Island Lake. This area is marked with a red diamond on the map here (39 degrees 00.356' N 120 degrees 15.384' W, WGS 84 datum) and is on Eldorado National Forest land. This riparian area is heavily used and severely impacted by 4x4 users of the Rubicon Trail. Let's take a look at what is happening to this water intended for fish health downstream.



The photos above are of the main crossing of the Little Rubicon below the dam at Buck Island Lake. The left photo is looking southeast toward Buck Island Lake and the right photo is looking back in the opposite direction. Please note the oil spill that ran down the granite and into the stream. Please note that the cobble streambed looks fairly clean here. The streambed looks different downstream from here as following photos will show.



Vehicle use is so heavy on the Rubicon Trail that this is the approach to an alternate crossing just downstream from the main crossing.

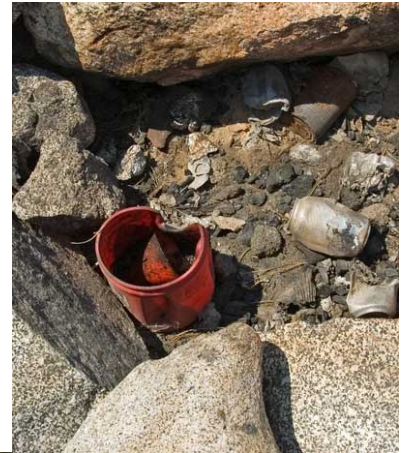


These are photos of the Little Rubicon just downstream from the crossing of the Rubicon Trail. These photos clearly show increased silt and sediments impacting the stream compared to conditions above the vehicle crossings.





This is just a part of the large camping area impacting the riparian area along the Little Rubicon. This photo shows numerous oil spills as vehicles sit and leak overnight or as repairs are made. Below is a photo of an abandoned oil container and a funnel left in a fire ring.



Human waste is of huge concern and an major issue along the entire run of the Rubicon Trail. This riparian area along the Little Rubicon River shows similar conditions that led to the public health closing of the Spider Lake area in the summer of 2004. This area has several user created outhouses. They range from kind of a standard style pictured on the left to the much more simplified version on the right consisting of just an overturned metal garbage can with a toilet seat mounted on it for all the comforts of home. This garbage can is within just a few feet of the water.



This a more elaborate "palace" built by the 4x4 users and moved from place to place in the surrounding area. In the Spider Lake area mounds of human waste were found in 2005 left behind as outhouses were moved after filling up in one spot. I took this photo with my back to a piece of slow water, a remnant of the water course during higher flows.

Right around the corner from this outhouse it was a shock to find numerous piles of toilet paper along with human feces lying on the ground



Conditions are tragic in this area. These are important water resources that are being allowed to be impacted. The solutions here are pretty straight forward if vehicle use is to be allowed to continue on the Rubicon Trail. All vehicle contact with the Little Rubicon needs to end with the placement of a suitable bridge over the river. This riparian area along the Little Rubicon needs to be permanently closed to all camping and followed up with necessary restoration. It is obvious that the number of users has already greatly exceeded the carrying capacity of the alpine environment along the Rubicon Trail; strict quotas are needed to reduce use. All human waste needs to be carried out by individual users with no more deposition out on the ground. The shift away from the historic use of slightly modified street legal and licensed vehicles over to extremely modified rock crawlers has greatly altered the character of the trail accelerating erosion and increasing the difficulty of travel resulting in more vehicle damage. This has led to increase oil spills. Restoration of the Trail to past historic conditions is long overdue to both address resource issues but also to limit vehicle damage. The solution also necessitates the elimination of green stickered OHVs, the extreme vehicles. If these and other necessary changes cannot be made, the Rubicon Trail needs to be closed to all motorized use.



El Dorado County calls the Rubicon Trail "The Crown Jewel of Four Wheeling." The photos used in this report were all taken by me on 16 July 2008 on a hike along "The Crown Jewel" between Ellis Creek and Buck Island Lake.

